

Peter and Paul is one of the great double-acts in the history of the Church. They appear to be inseparable. You see an icon of Peter and somewhere close by will be an image of Paul. Peter with his mighty key and the power to unlock the gates of the Kingdom, Paul with a magnificent sword, symbolising the power of God's irresistible Word. But like many a stage couple they actually did not have much time for one another. They met infrequently; and on at least one occasion, recorded by Paul in the Letter to the Galatians, they rowed fiercely.

But they did share much in common, including a name change.

Paul, when he first appears in the Acts of the Apostles as a man supporting the mob who stone Stephen, is known as Saul. He was of the tribe of Benjamin and the most famous member of that clan was Saul, the first King of Israel. We tend to imagine that the change of name came with the change of occupation. When persecutor of the Church became the Church's fearless preacher, Saul became Paul. The truth is probably more matter-of-fact. He probably always had two names and their use changed depending on whose company he was in. When with Jews, the Jewish name Saul would have been appropriate. When in gentile, Hellenistic company then the similar but Latin name, Paul, would have been preferred. In a similar way, when I was a student in Rome the sisters who looked after the kitchen and laundry called me, not John, but Giovanni - in fact Giovanni venti-quattro, John 24, as that was my laundry number - and the nearest I'll get to the papacy.

Paul comes from paulus meaning small, which has suggested to some that the name describes Paul's stature. There is no evidence of this.

We do though get some idea of the character of Simon, the fisherman son of Jonas, from his received name, we would call it a nick-name, Peter, that is not so much rock as rocky. The pun works both in Aramaic and English (though not in Greek). Rocky suggests (as in the movies of that name) someone hard, resolute, not to be messed with. But rocky also means shaky, unstable, liable to collapse. Peter so wanted to be firm and resolute, but in the Gospel story though his spirit is ever willing his flesh is always weak.

The two chief apostles, Peter "our leader in the faith" and Paul "its fearless preacher" also shared in both being flawed men. Paul an enthusiast at whatever he set himself and, as with all such people, impossible to live with; no one could keep up with him. Peter wanting to take the message to Gentiles but covered by the zeal of James, the brother of the Lord and leader of the Church in Jerusalem, and his circumcision party. Hence that ferocious clash ferociously I mentioned. It was over the question of eating with gentiles. Peter was quite happy to eat with gentiles until members of James' faction arrived and then Peter refused to dine with anyone except Jews. Paul was livid and told Peter so "to his face". Hardly Christian fraternal love in evidence. In this letter he expresses the wish that the knife doing the circumcising had slipped

in a few cases. Hardly saintly talk. If Peter and Paul had to undergo the present day process of canonisation neither would have been a 'shoe-in'! They show how the Lord chooses the weak and makes them strong in bearing witness to him.

And Tradition records that each died for the faith they preached, Peter crucified in Nero's circus on the Vatican Hill; Paul beheaded out on the Road to Rome's port, Ostia at a place now called *Tre Fontane*. Rome's claim to primacy for its Bishop over the other great patriarchs is based on the place of the martyrdoms of the two great apostles.

That is what united them: living and dying for Christ. Flaws are forgotten, arguments are put into perspective, and names are remembered, and hallowed. A great double act: Peter forever our leader in the faith; Paul eternally its fearless preacher.